

98-67

RECEIVED

APR - 6 2004

-----Original Message-----

From: antonio.goodwin@att.net [mailto:antonio.goodwin@att.net]

Sent: Thursday, March 25, 2004 5:31 PM

To: Michael Powell

Subject: VRS should be a madatory service

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

Chairman Powell:

I am requesting the FCC view VRS as a mandatory service, functionally equivalent to hearing persons telephone conversations as other relay services provided currently.

VRS is a necessary means of telecommunicatoion access for the deaf population , which had no means of telephone access until the time VRS was introduced 2 years ago.

ASA requirements and other means of quality control, should indeed be applied to this VRS service. Without this oversight, the Consumer using this service has not achieved an equal status to telephone access.

Thanks for your prompt attention to this matter.

Regards,

Antonio Goodwin
ASL, PSE Interpreter

98-67

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APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: Bonnie Burleson [mailto:bburleson@norcalcenter.org]

Sent: Wednesday, February 25, 2004 1:30 PM

To: Michael Powell; Kevin Martin; Kathleen Abernathy; Michael Copps;
jonathon.aldestein@fcc.gov

Subject: VRS as a mandatory service!

To Whom It May Concern:

I am requesting that you (FCC) view VRS as a mandatory service, functionally equivalent to hearing person's telephone conversations as other relay services provided currently, that VRS is a necessary means of telecommunication access for the deaf population who has no other means of telephone access up until the time VRS was introduced 2 years ago. ASA requirements and other means of quality control should indeed be applied to this VRS service. Without this oversight, the Consumer using this service has not achieved an equal status to telephone access.

Bonnie Burleson
Parent Links Consultant
4708 Roseville Road, Ste. 112
916-349-7500

-----Original Message-----

From: Barnonhill@aol.com [mailto:Barnonhill@aol.com]

Sent: Saturday, February 28, 2004 10:05 PM

To: Michael Powell; Kevin Martin; Kathleen Abernathy; Michael Copps; jonathon.aldestein@FCC.GOV

Subject: VRS Must be a Mandatory service at FCC

9867

RECEIVED

Feb 28, 2004

APR - 6 2004

Dear FCC Commissioners:

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

It has come to my attention that the FCC is about to make a decision about a service that has recently become available for deaf people who's primary mode of communication is ASL. There are various communication needs of people with disabilities. Traditionally, the deaf relay service has been set up for the majority of deaf and hard of hearing Consumers who can use a text-based form of telephone service via TTY relay or online (internet) relay. In this case however, this visual form of communication via telephone access (introduced 2 years ago) for a segment of our population who cannot benefit from text-based relay services desperately need Video Relay Interpreting services (VRS) as their functional equivalent service.

As I understand it, the FCC considers VRS an "optional" service, not a mandatory one. I've only recently become aware of this issue and understand that this decision has been based on internal dialouge with the FCC and input from vendors over the rate issue. Has there been a public comment period asking for Consumers input directly? You may not know it but **people with disabilities do not want decisions made about them without them!!**

Regardless of which VRS provider you use, this is not the result we want for consumers. We want functionally equivalent service for all segments of the deaf population and need you to support the users who depend on sign language as their primary mode of communication.

ASA requirements and other means of quality control, should indeed be applied to this VRS service. Without this oversight, the Consumer using this service has not achieved an equal status to telephone access.

- Equal Communication Access for All,

SUSAN BARNHILL

Disability Advocate

1675 Union Square Road

West Sacramento, CA 95691

916 372-4006, fax 372-4044

Cell 916 548-4961

CDR Foundation Treasurer, New World Editor

www.disabilityrights--cdr.org

Consultant DREES' website: Station504.com

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APR - 6 2004

-----Original Message-----

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

From: Cheryl Heppner [mailto:cheppner@nvrc.org]

Sent: Monday, February 23, 2004 5:35 PM

To: Michael Powell; Kathleen Abernathy; Kevin Martin; Jonathan Adelstein; Michael Copps

Cc: Matthew Brill; Carolyn Conyers; Jessica Rosenworcel; Daniel Gonzalez; Scott Bergmann;

Scott Bergmann; Bryan Tramont; Bryan Tramont; Christopher Libertelli

Subject: VRS waiver for speed of answer

Dear Chairman Powell and Commissioners Abernathy, Martin, Copps, and Adelstein,

I am the Vice Chair of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumer Advocacy Network. It has come to our coalition's attention today that you will probably be making a decision early this week on one Video Relay service waiver issue. This waiver issue concerns the speed of answer that one gets when dialing for a VRS call.

The FCC currently requires that the TRS providers must answer calls within ten seconds equal to or higher than eighty five percent at all times. This requirement has been waived for Video Relay Service calls to allow for this service to evolve on an experimental basis.

However, the number of VRS calls has accumulated by leaps and bounds on a monthly basis in the last two years since this service began, and we really need to see the speed of answer be made a mandatory requirement for the VRS providers, not to be given waiver extensions anymore. We want to have the same quick access to the VRS service that we enjoy with the traditional TRS service. We seek to have functional equivalency, like those who experience regular voice phone service.

The same goes to those without hearing disabilities that need to make calls with us via VRS; they would also experience functional equivalency. They would not experience as much lag time during turns of conversation in a phone call. For example, one using voice would speak 200 words per minute and the person signing back to the agent via VRS would sign 200 words per minute. The agent would facilitate communication without any delay to either party. Functional equivalency is something we value very much, and please be assured this is not an added-on value, as some may call it, to the array of features in relay services. We respectfully ask that you grant a mandatory speed of answer requirement in the earliest time possible. We ask that we be required to experience the consequences of such a waiver for the next four years.

Thank you for giving DHHCAN's request your full, serious consideration.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Heppner

Vice Chair, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumer Advocacy Network

3951 Pender Drive, Suite 130

Fairfax, VA 22030

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APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: Chris Bingaman [mailto:cbingaman@ilrc-trico.org]

Sent: Friday, February 27, 2004 1:30 PM

To: Michael Powell

Subject: attn. Chris Libertelli

I am requesting that you & Chairman Powell view VRS as a mandatory service, functionally equivalent to hearing persons telephone conversations as other relay services provided currently, that VRS is an necessary means of telecommunication access for the deaf population who has no other means of telephone access up til the time VRS was introduced 2 years ago. ASA requirements and other means of quality control, should indeed be applied to this VRS service. Without this oversight, the Consumer using this service has not achieved an equal status to telephone access.

--

Chris Bingaman
Independent Living Resource Center
1150 Laurel Lane Suite 184
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401
(805) 593-0667
cbingaman@ilrc-trico.org

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APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: Christopher Merritt [<mailto:cmerritt@lifecil.com>]
Sent: Friday, February 27, 2004 4:48 PM
To: Michael Powell
Subject: VRS AS A MANDATORY SERVICE

I request, as a deaf person in America, requesting FCC to consider VRS as a mandatory service and not grant waivers dismissing quality controls over this service.

Thank you,

Christopher Merritt
Living Independence For Everyone
Deaf Services Coordinator
17-21 Travis Street
Savannah, Georgia 31406
800-948-4824
912-920-2414 Voice
912-920-2419 TTY
912-920-0007 Fax

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APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: Corder, Charlene F. [mailto:CCorder@dor.ca.gov]

Sent: Thursday, February 26, 2004 5:17 PM

To: Michael Powell

Subject: Video Relay Services

98-67

Chairman Powell, Chris Libertelli and Bryan Tramont:

RE: Granting waivers to keep VRS an optional/desirable service to not require average speed of answering the calls (ASA).

I am a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with State of California Department of Rehabilitation and my mission, goal and responsibility is to assist people who are Deaf into employment. I work closely with people who are Deaf and do not understand English and sometimes struggle with American Sign Language. They are consumers who are considered "minimally Language" users and rely solely on visual communication, not spoken or written communication. They have been able to have communication access where before they were not. I concur with the statement below and request your support in maintaining the ASA and not approving the waiver. VRS as a mandatory service, functionally equivalent to hearing persons telephone conversations as other relay services provided currently, that VRS is an necessary means of telecommunication access for the deaf population who has no other means of telephone access up until the time VRS was introduced 2 years ago. ASA requirements and other means of quality control, should indeed be applied to this VRS service. Without this oversight, the Consumer using this service has not achieved an equal status to telephone access.

Sincerely,

Charlene F. Corder

Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

-----Original Message-----

From: Danielle Thompson [mailto:dthompson@norcalcenter.org]
Sent: Wednesday, February 25, 2004 12:35 PM
To: Michael Powell; Kevin Martin; Kathleen Abernathy; Michael Copps
Subject: MAKE VRS A MANDATORY SERVICE

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APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

98-67

Dear Sir/Madam:

I know you are all very busy people, however I want to make my point loud and clear:
MAKE VRS A MANDATORY SERVICE!!

It was brought to my attention FCC is planning to make VRS an "optional" service. I currently work with many Deaf and Hard of Hearing who struggle to communicate using text messaging for many reasons. I have been using VRS with my clients and make it a habit for them to make phone, calls, contacts etc using VRS. I am absolutely shocked and outraged you made such a decision to make this service "optional" WITHOUT consulting consumers. This is like a dictatorship, making decisions to satisfy your Hearing consumers but leaving out the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. It is insulting and humiliating that you perceive us as second class citizens and went on to make such rash decisions, such as this one on making VRS optional.

NO where have I seen you doing any surveys on determining how many people use the VRS service, how often we use these services, etc. If you did send out such surveys, then why wasn't it advertised for us as Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers to read, etc. ??

It also baffles me you made comments such as "saving ratepayers money" whose money are you saving? Who is more important : your hearing folks or we "second class citizens" as you have already labeled us??"

If it is not in your heart to consider other persons who use VRS service, you should make this aware to all Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers and stop trying to hide and make decisions without consulting us. You are probably aware that we Deaf and Hard of Hearing folks will make "Noise!". I will not back down and I will continue to rally my folks to make sure VRS becomes a MANDATORY SERVICE and not the ridiculous optional service as you are planning.

Sincerely,
Danielle Thompson.

Danielle A. Thompson
Outreach Coordinator/Client Advocate - Redding
1003 Yuba St., Ste A
Redding, CA 96001
530.229.9073 TTY, dail 711 for relay
530.229.9071 Voice
530.229.9077 Fax
E-Mail: dthompson@norcalcenter.org*****

-----Original Message-----

From: Dave Morrison [mailto:davidalanmorrison@hotmail.com]

Sent: Friday, March 19, 2004 4:20 PM

To: Michael Powell

Cc: Kathleen Abernathy; Michael Copps; Kevin Martin; Jonathan Adelstein; Dave Snowden; margaret.eglar@fcc.gov; Thomas Chandler

Subject: Video Relay for the Deaf

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APR - 6 2004

98-67

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

Dear Sirs and Madame;

In respect for your busy schedules, I will keep this email brief. This subject has far reaching effects that are much weightier than the brevity of this correspondence makes them seem.

Several months ago, the F.C.C. cut the rate of funding to the Video Relay Services (VRS). The VRS is a service whereby a person who communicates in sign language can access a sign language interpreter in order to make telephone calls to people who are not deaf/ hard of hearing and may not have a TTY to communicate.

THIS SERVICE IS NOT THE TEXT BASED RELAY OFTEN CALLED THE TRS. VRS allows native users of sign language to use their own language to conduct business, rather than resorting to using their second (or third) language. It is faster, smoother and more 'user friendly' than TRS.

Due to this funding cut, the VRS has suffered greatly on several fronts.

I am asking your help to reinstate the appropriate funding. Restoring adequate service to make the telephone service functionally equivalent for the disabled.

Please note the following:

- 1) There is NO NEW fiscal impact or increases for this service. Several years ago, the FCC implemented a surcharge on all phone service to fund the program. Those funds are STILL being collected; yet the monies being paid INTO the service programs has been reduced. What is happening to that money?
- 2) The FCC is abandoning its mandate to ensure functional equivalency. Due to the dramatic rate cuts, VRS service has been reduced in hours. IT IS NOT A 24 /7 OPERATION AND WILL NEVER BE UNDER THESE RESTRICTIONS. So are you saying that Deaf / HOH people are not worthy enough to warrant a phone call at 2 AM?
- 3) The FCC touts reduction of the VRS rate as a savings to rate payers, but IGNORES the hardship this brings to the Deaf / HOH community. Since the money is STILL BEING PAID regardless of the cuts - how is this rate cut saving money?
- 4) TRS (typed relay service) is NOT functionally equivalent for the Deaf. Many Deaf and HOH people do not have English as their first language. Text based relays force them to conduct (often) complicated business in their second language. It is also time consuming. I urge you to make a simple telephone call using a TTY. See for yourself if this is 'equivalency'.
- 5) This rate cut is putting sign language interpreters at health risk. Due to the cuts, interpreters are often forced to work longer than the industry standards indicate is 'safe' for the human body. This puts an undue burden on vendors when these interpreters start to file worker's comp claims.

I urge you to get involved. I am asking you to demand the FCC do its job and make relay linguistically and functionally equivalent.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Dave Morrison
8845 La Riviera Drive/ Unit C
Sacramento, CA 95826

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Service Center, Inc.

5340 N. Fresno St.

Fresno, CA 93710

(559) 225-3323V (559) 225-0415 TTY

(559) 225-0116 Fax

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APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

9867

Dear Chairman Powell,

February 26, 2004

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Service Center, Inc. provides advocacy for eight substantially far-reaching counties of California. Within Fresno, Tulare, Kings, Madera, Mariposa Merced, Monterey and San Benito counties, of Central California, there are an estimated **131,520** women, men and children who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf/blind or late deafened. We are asking on behalf of each of these individuals and their families that the Federal Communications Commission continues to insure the highest standards of quality and excellence in Video Relay Services.

Unimpeded access to information is a cornerstone of self-determination, independence and equality. Denying an individual access to true communication severs their rights and responsibilities as participating members of our country. For those individuals who are fortunate to be fluent in the English language Text Relay Services **may** perhaps suffice. However, it has been repeatedly proven that the average adult who is Deaf only attains a third or fourth grade level of English proficiency. Video Relay Services have truly opened the door for our families and neighbors to contribute and inquire in their most fluent and effective mode of communication.

Please consider the eroding and damaging effects to our citizens of not **requiring** quality, timely and complete access to Video Relay Services. The FCC would, in effect, be squelching and stripping men, women and children of their right to communication and civic engagement. Upon thoughtful consideration of the value of self-determination and equality we are confident you and your fellow commissioners will uphold the basic rights of our citizens to participate fully in the world around them.

We truly welcome your questions and thoughts. Please feel free to contact us at your convenience.

Sincerely,

(Submitted via e-mail)

Rosemary W. Diaz,

Executive Director

Cc: DHHSC Board of Directors

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APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: Dirk Neyhart [mailto:genetic@igc.org]

Sent: Friday, February 27, 2004 3:31 PM

To: Michael Powell

Subject: Attn: Chris Libertelli or Bryan Tramont/ VRS Funding

February 27, 2004

Secretary, Federal Communications Commission
Washington D.C.

98.67

Dear Mr. Powell,

As I get older, the acuity of my hearing diminishes. If I become deaf I want my government to ensure my continued participation in social, economic, and political events. So I ask you to increase funding for VRS - not diminish or abolish the funding. It is needed by my friend and may well be needed by you and me, brother.

Sincerely,
Dirk Neyhart
1400 Hearst Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94702
510-410-1400
genetic@igc.org

cc: Martin

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APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: Denise Madland [mailto:dmadland@norcalcenter.org]

Sent: Wednesday, February 25, 2004 12:48 PM

To: Michael Powell

Subject: attn: Chris Libertelli or Bryan Tramont

98-67

I am requesting that the FCC view VRS as a mandatory service, functionally equivalent to hearing persons telephone conversations as other relay services provided currently, that VRS is a necessary means of telecommunication access for the deaf population who haven't had other means of telephone access up until the time VRS was introduced 2 years ago. ASA requirements and other means of quality control should indeed be applied to this VRS service. Without this oversight, the Consumer using this service has not achieved an equal status to telephone access.

Denise M. Madland
CAST Program Manager
NorCal Center on Deafness
4708 Roseville Road, Ste. 112
North Highlands, CA 95660
(916) 349-7525 v/tty

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Deaf and Hard of Hearing Service Center, Inc.

5340 N. Fresno St.

Fresno, CA 93710

(559) 225-3323V (559) 225-0415 TTY

(559) 225-0116 Fax

APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

98-67

Dear Chairman Powell,

February 26, 2004

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Please consider the eroding and damaging effects to our citizens of not **requiring** quality, timely and complete access to Video Relay Services. The FCC would, in effect, be squelching and stripping men, women and children of their right to communication and civic engagement. Upon thoughtful consideration of the value of self-determination and equality we are confident you and your fellow commissioners will uphold the basic rights of our citizens to participate fully in the world around them.

We truly welcome your questions and thoughts. Please feel free to contact us at your convenience.

Sincerely,

(Submitted via e-mail)

Rosemary W. Diaz,

Executive Director

Cc: DHHSC Board of Directors

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APR - 6 2004

-----Original Message-----

From: EDKOCDEAF@aol.com [mailto:EDKOCDEAF@aol.com]

Sent: Sunday, February 29, 2004 8:42 PM

To: Michael Powell; Kevin Martin; Kathleen Abernathy; michel.copps@fcc.gov;
johathon.aldestein@fcc.gov; Thomas Chandler

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

Subject: Video Relay Service

February 29, 2004

96-87

Dear FCC Commissioners,

I have been asked to write to you on behalf of the California Coalition of Agencies Serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CCASDHH). We are a coalition that consist of 8 agencies statewide and also include a representative from the California Association of the Deaf.

It has come to our attention that the FCC is about to make a decision regarding a Video Relay Service that has recently become available for the Deaf. CCASDHH supports the options for various communicaton needs of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. We are deeply disappointed to learn that the FCC considers VRS an "optional" service and not a "mandatory" service to be provided by the TRS providers. We are asking you to make this a "mandatory" service that TRS providers must provide.

In your website, www.fcc.gov/realaudio/presentations/2004/011504/cgb.ppt under Access by People with Disabilities states "Comprehensive review of the TRS providers data resulted in significant reduction of Video Relay Service reimbursement rate and savings of millions of dollars for the U.S. telecommunications rate payers". As a result of this, VRS providers have cut their hours and services to the Deaf community. The deaf community now cannot use VRS service 24 hours a day. In this same website "Not a One-Way Street" you claim that you have solicited input from consumers. We have never been contacted or know of any deaf person that have been contacted about the use of VRS. Therefore we feel that the FCC is making decisions on their own rather than expanding outreach to the underserved stakeholders(e.g. people with disabilities, rural communities) as stated in your "2003 Goals".

Some of the TRS providers have provided VRS for over two years as an "experimental" program. These providers have proven to you that there is a need for Video Relay Services. Some of the CCASDHH agencies have the set up to allow consumers to use the D Link equipment or webcams. We have seen a great need for this service mainly among consumers who have very limited English skills and Sign Language is their main mode of communication. With the use of VRS, deaf people become more independent and can communicate their needs effectively through sign language.

We are also asking that you require ASA and other means of quality control to be applied to the Video Relay Services by the TRS providers.

Thank you,

Ed Kelly, Chair

California Coalition of Agencies Serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

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APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: DONKHAI@aol.com [mailto:DONKHAI@aol.com]

Sent: Wednesday, February 25, 2004 3:53 PM

To: Michael Powell

Subject: Chris Libertelli or Bryan Tramont

Dear Chairman Powell:

Attn.: Chris Libertelli or Bryan Tramont

I am prelingually Deaf (since birth), and my primary language is American Sign Language. English is my secondary language. I express myself best via ASL. I beg you to consider VRS (Video Relay Service) be made available to deaf consumers in exactly the same way TTY equipment/service are available to us.

Thank you,
Donald L. Rosenkjar

98-67

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APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: James W Stover [mailto:madbull42@juno.com]

Sent: Tuesday, February 17, 2004 1:53 AM

To: Michael Powell

Subject: Fw: Fw: Regarding to the Closed Captioning from Jackie Stover of AR.

98-67

----- Forwarded message -----

From: James W Stover <Madbull42@juno.com>

To: enorthup@sbcglobal.net

Date: Mon, 16 Feb 2004 14:34:26 -0600

Subject: Fw: Regarding to the Closed Captioning from Jackie Stover of AR.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: James W Stover <Madbull42@juno.com>

To: president@whitehouse.gov

Date: Mon, 16 Feb 2004 14:21:19 -0600

Subject: Regarding to the Closed Captioning from Jackie Stover of AR.

Dear President Bush,

Please have closed captioned be on televisions, for emergency, business or public purposes as we cannot hear to know what is being said, nor can we lipread 100 %, at least maybe 60 % or worse and we rely on our eyes to read visual words to be able to understand better as well as sign language if given.

I was growing up in a dark world for about 40 years until when the closed captioned was invented and then I was able to appreciate and understand most of the television programs with the closed captioned on. It helped me to improve my knowledge of the facts of our lives with the medical terms in ER, some of the Soap Operas about what it was like to be in a rich or poor family, any educational programs will enhance our minds - mystery movies, any comedian movies, and home decoration series are helpful to know what we can do with our lives as guidance ways. It helps us to do right things from wrong things.

If there is no more closed captioned for lots of television programs, then we will be behind with the times and be in the darker world again.

Please reconsider and let us always have our closed captioned on television programs.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jackie Stover, one of the deaf (with profoundly hearing loss) American citizen

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APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: HolLynn D'Lil [mailto:hdlil@earthlink.net]

Sent: Thursday, February 26, 2004 11:18 PM

To: Michael Powell

Subject: Please Keep VRS Mandatory

98-67

Dear M. Powell:

Please view VRS as a mandatory service, functionally equivalent to hearing persons telephone conversations as other relay services provided currently. VRS is an necessary means of telecommunication access for the deaf population who has no other means of telephone access up til the time VRS was introduced 2 years ago. ASA requirements and other means of quality control, should indeed be applied to this VRS service. Without this oversight, the Consumer using this service has not achieved an equal status to telephone access.

Thank you for your time and attention to this:
HolLynn D'Lil
Sacramento, California

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APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: Hendricks, John W. [mailto:JHendric@dor.ca.gov]

Sent: Thursday, February 26, 2004 3:39 PM

To: Michael Powell; Kevin Martin; Kathleen Abernathy; Michael Copps;
'jonathon.aldestein@fcc.gov'

Subject: VRS

98-67

I urge you to view VRS as a mandatory service functionally equivalent to hearing persons telephone conversations as other relay services provided currently, VRS is a necessary means of telecommunication access for the deaf population who have no other means of telephone access up until the time VRS was introduced 2 years ago. ASA requirements and other means of quality control, should indeed be applied to this VRS service. Without this oversight, the Consumer using this service has not achieved an equal status to telephone access.
Sincerely,

John W. Hendricks
Stockton, CA

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APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: Harner, Kathy [mailto:Kharner@dor.ca.gov]

Sent: Thursday, February 26, 2004 12:10 PM

To: Michael Powell; Kevin Martin; Kathleen Abernathy; Michael Copps;
'jonathon.aldestein@fcc.gov'

Subject: URGENT!! - Re: VRS decision

98-67

To Whom It May Concern: As a rehabilitation professional who works with the Deaf community, I strongly urge you to make a determination that Video Relay Interpreting services (VRS) be considered a MANDATORY service, NOT optional. The advent of VRS has been nothing short of a miracle for the many deaf individuals who need reliable phone/communication service in their primary communication mode (visual sign language). PLEASE, I urge you to take this step forward in providing equal access to ALL of our citizens.

THANK YOU!!!!

Kathy Harner, M.S.
Dept. of Rehabilitation
509 E. Montecito Street, #101
Santa Barbara, CA 93103
(805) 560-8150
(805) 560-8162 FAX

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APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: John Kirby [mailto:john@drail.org]

Sent: Monday, March 01, 2004 12:02 PM

To: Michael Powell

Cc: Kevin Martin; Kathleen Abernathy; Michael Copps; jonathon.aldestein@fcc.gov

Subject: Visual Relay Service

98.67

Dear FCC Board:

It has come to my attention that the FCC is about to make a decision about a service that has recently become available for deaf people who's primary mode of communication is ASL. Disability Resource for Independent Living (DRAIL) supports options for various communication needs of the population we serve. Traditionally, the relay service has been set up for the majority of deaf and hard of hearing Consumers who can use a text-based form of telephone service via TTY relay or online (internet) relay. In this case however, this visual form of communication via telephone access for a segment of the deaf population who cannot benefit from text-based relay services desperately need Video Relay Interpreting services as their functional equivalent service. At this time, the FCC considers Visual Relay Service (VRS) an "optional" service, not mandatory. The FCC currently requires that the TRS providers must answer calls within ten seconds equal to or higher than 85% of the time. This requirement has been waived for the VRS calls to allow for this service after 2 years of "experimenting" to continue as if its a secondary means of communication rather than a deaf person's primary for access to the telephone service.

DRAIL strongly requests that the FCC view VRS as a mandatory service, functionally equivalent to hearing persons telephone conversations as other relay services provided currently, that VRS is an necessary means of telecommunication access for the deaf population who has no other means of telephone access, as VRS was introduced 2 years ago. ASA requirements and other means of quality control, should indeed be applied to this VRS service. Without this oversight, the Consumer using this service has not achieved an equal status to telephone access.

Sincerely,

John Kirby
System Change Coordinator

Disability Resource Agency (DRAIL)
221 McHenry Avenue
Modesto, CA 95354
Phone: 209-521-7260 Ext. 112
Email: john@drail.org

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APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: Karen Freitas [mailto:kfreitas@norcalcenter.org]
Sent: Wednesday, February 25, 2004 12:51 PM
To: Michael Copps
Subject: FW: Save the VRS service

98-67

From: Karen Freitas
Sent: Wed 2/25/2004 9:44 AM
To: michael.powell@fcc.gov
Subject: Save the VRS service

Dear Chris Libertelli, Bryan Tramont, Dan Gonzales, Jason Williams, Matt Brill, Jessica Rosenworcel, Scott Bergman
My name is Karen Freitas from Redding CA. I am very supportive VRS as a mandatory service. It is very important to our deaf community. Do not throw away. VRS is used by deaf and hard of hearing people for equal communication access to the telephone service.
Karen Freitas/Client Advocate
for NorCal Center On Deafness

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APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: Karen Freitas [mailto:kfreitas@norcalcenter.org]

Sent: Wednesday, February 25, 2004 12:45 PM

To: Michael Powell

Subject: Save the VRS service

Dear Chris Libertelli, Bryan Tramont, Dan Gonzales, Jason Williams, Matt Brill, Jessica Rosenworcel, Scott Bergman

My name is Karen Freitas from Redding CA. I am very supportive VRS as a mandatory service. It is very important to our deaf community. Do not throw away. VRS is used by deaf and hard of hearing people for equal communication access to the telephone service.

Karen Freitas/Client Advocate
for NorCal Center On Deafness

98-67

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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: Karen Idler [mailto:kidler@norcalcenter.org]

Sent: Wednesday, February 25, 2004 4:18 PM

To: Michael Powell

Subject:

98-67

Attention: Chris Libertelli & Bryan Tramont

HELP!!! I am writing to plead with you! I am requesting that the FCC view VRS as a mandatory service, functionally equivalent to hearing persons' telephone conversations, just as other relay services are currently provided! **VRS is a necessary means of telecommunication access for the deaf population** who had no other means of telephone access until VRS was introduced 2 years ago! ASA requirements and other means of quality control should also be applied to VRS service. Without this, deaf consumers using this service have not achieved telephone access ***equal to*** the hearing population. Thank you for your assistance in this vital matter which impacts the lives of all Deaf and Hard of Hearing and those they need to communicate with.

Karen Idler,
Job Developer/Employment Advocate
NorCal Center on Deafness
EDD Roseville
1880 Sierra Gardens - Suite 100
Roseville, CA 95661
(916)774-4035 TTY/Voice

"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."

- Winston Churchill

-----Original Message-----

From: Kelby Brick [mailto:Brick@nad.org]
Sent: Monday, February 23, 2004 11:58 PM
To: KAQuinn
Subject: VRS issues

98-67

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APR - 6 2004

Dear Chairman Powell, Commissioners Abernathy, Martin, Copps, and Adelstein,

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

It has come to our attention that you may be making a ruling shortly on the issue of VRS waivers and the rate paid for VRS service.

While such waivers are not intended to be long-term nor permanent, this issue requires serious review to ascertain functional equivalency, using the open forum approach which has yet to happen.

The NAD will not support any long term waiver and therefore ask that the FCC expeditiously address the VRS issues including the reimbursement rate and answering speed issues. We believe VRS should be a mandatory service.

Congress defined relay services to mean "telephone transmission services that provide the ability for an individual who has a hearing impairment or speech impairment to engage in communication by wire or radio with a hearing individual in a manner that is **functionally equivalent** to the ability of a non disabled individual using voice communication services including the telephone."

It is critical that the FCC does everything it can to ensure that relay services come as close as possible to **functionally equivalent**. The key phrase in this definition is the term "functionally equivalent." For many deaf and hard of hearing individuals, VRS is the closest form of functional equivalent services as is possible for today's technology. VRS is still far from true functionally equivalent but, is for many deaf and hard of hearing individuals, far closer than any other form of relay services.

Accordingly, the NAD respectfully requests that the FCC do everything in its power to support the growth and development of VRS. We believe that this action is not only necessary, but also mandatory if the FCC is to comply with Congress' expectation that relay services be functionally equivalent. Anything short of expeditious action to support the growth and development of VRS by the FCC would continue to segregate deaf and hard of hearing individuals from the services that are currently available for non-disabled individuals.

Established in 1880, the NAD is the oldest and largest consumer-based national advocacy organization safeguarding the civil and accessibility rights of 28 million deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the United States of America. The mission of the National Association of the Deaf is to promote, protect, and preserve the rights and quality of life of deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the United States of America. The NAD works closely with deafness related national organizations and is a member of several coalitions representing the interests of deaf, hard of hearing, late deafened and deaf-blind individuals.

Sincerely,
Kelby N. Brick

Kelby N. Brick, Esq.
Associate Executive Director/Law & Advocacy
National Association of the Deaf
814 Thayer Ave.

Silver Spring, MD 20910

See you at the 47th Biennial NAD Conference!

"Eye to the Future"

July 6-10, 2004 - Kansas City, MO

For more info: "Conference" at www.nad.org

Are you a member? If not, why not? www.nad.org/join.html

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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: Margaret Dowling [mailto:maggiedee@earthlink.net]

Sent: Wednesday, March 10, 2004 11:50 PM

To: Michael Powell; Kevin Martin; Kathleen Abernathy; Michael Copps;
jonathon.aldestein@fcc.gov

Subject: Hearing impaired/deaf issue

98-67

Please do not extend the waivers for answer speed for another 4 years!

Have you asked for and received deaf consumer direct one-on-one feedback. It seems that no one in the community has been extended an invitation to comment or participate in any way. Can you please send me a list of consumer groups who have been invited to discuss the issues at hand? Thanks.

Maggie Dee-Dowling, Producer - KUSF, 90.3 FM (San Francisco),
"Disability and Senior News Report", 12:30 p.m. Sundays.

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APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: Marla Hall [mailto:mhall@pirs.org]
Sent: Monday, March 01, 2004 12:50 PM
To: Michael Powell
Subject: VRS/mandatory service

98-67

Dear Chairman Powell,
Please count me as a service provider at an independent living center, as in support of viewing VRS as a mandatory service, functionally equivalent to hearing persons telephone conversations as other relay services provided currently, that VRS is a necessary means of telecommunication access for the deaf population who has no other means of telephone access up till the time VRS was introduced 2 yrs ago. ASA requirements and other means of quality control should indeed be applied to this VRS service. Without this oversight the consumer using this service has NOT achieved an equal status to telephone access.

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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: Matthew Lafler [mailto:mlafler@norcalcenter.org]

Sent: Wednesday, February 25, 2004 4:37 PM

To: Michael Powell

Cc: Kevin Martin; Kathleen Abernathy; Michael Copps; jonathon.aldestein@fcc.gov; Thomas Chandler; Phyllis Chandler

Subject: Feedback FCC/VRS as a functional equivalent relay service

Dear Chairman Michael Powell (Attn: Chris Libertelli/Bryan Tramont);
Commissioner Martin (Attn: Dan Gonzales/Jason Williams)
Commissioner Abernathy (Attn: Matt Brill)
Commissioner Copps (Attn: Jessica Rosenworcel)
Commissioner Aldestein (Attn: Scott Bergman)

98-67

The possible decision concerning the FCC decision about the Video Relay Service (VRS) as an optional service is pretty much unacceptable. Seems like everyone in the FCC doesn't have a clue of how VRS benefits the Deaf Community. It appears that the people at FCC are catering to the "hearing folks" and ignoring the needs of the Deaf. Does the FCC ever think for a moment to consider the actions which could affect a population whose lives have pretty much been in isolation and struggling to communication in a society today? You may want to consider familiarizing yourselves that VRS as a mandatory service, functionally equivalent to hearing persons telephone conversations as other relay services provided currently, that VRS is an necessary means of telecommunication access for the deaf population who has no other means of telephone access up until the time VRS was introduced 2 years ago. ASA requirements and other means of quality control, should indeed be applied to this VRS service. Without this oversight, the Consumer using this service has not achieved an equal status to telephone access. I would hope you consider yourselves as representing the Deaf population as well.

Thank you
Hugh Lafler
NorCal Center on Deafness

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APR - 6 2004

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

-----Original Message-----

From: Mfinn000@aol.com [mailto:Mfinn000@aol.com]

Sent: Wednesday, February 25, 2004 3:00 PM

To: Michael Powell; Kevin Martin; Kathleen Abernathy; Michael Copps;
jonathon.aldestein@fcc.gov

Subject: Vote concerning ASA on Video Relay Service

98-67

It has come to my attention that the FCC is about to make a decision about a service that has recently become available for deaf people who's primary mode of communication is ASL. Association of Late Deafened Adults (ALDA), as many of you know, supports options for various communication needs of the population we serve. Traditionally, the relay service has been set up for the majority of deaf and hard of hearing Consumers who can use a text-based form of telephone service via TTY relay or online (Internet) relay, some of us have even enjoyed the benefits of CapTel. In this case however, this visual form of communication via telephone access for a segment of our population who cannot benefit from text-based relay services desperately need Video Relay Interpreting services as their functional equivalent service. At this time, the FCC considers VRS an "optional" service, not mandatory. As Commissioners, you are about to make a decision any minute now, to grant waivers to keep this as an optional/desirable service and not require any average speed of answering the calls (ASA). The FCC currently requires that the TRS providers must answer calls within ten seconds equal to or higher than 85% of the time. This requirement has been waived for the VRS calls to allow for this service after 2 years of "experimenting" to continue as if its a secondary means of communication rather than a deaf person's primary form of access to the telephone service.

I am requesting that the FCC view VRS as a mandatory service, functionally equivalent to hearing persons telephone conversations as other relay services provided currently, that VRS is a necessary means of telecommunication access for the deaf population who has no other means of telephone access up until the time VRS was introduced 2 years ago. ASA requirements and other means of quality control, should indeed be applied to this VRS service. Without this oversight, the Consumer using this service has not achieved an equal status to telephone access.

Thank you in advance for taking the above position concerning the pending vote on Video Relay Service.

Mark Finn

Late Deafened Representative for California Relay Service